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# Administering International Studies Curriculum: A Fast Growing Major in Search of a Home

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## Abstract

The rapid growth of international studies curriculums and constituent majors in colleges and universities across the United States has left many institutions in a quandary – where should these programs be housed and how should they be administered? Given the interdisciplinary conception of international studies, it is hard to find a disciplinary home. As a result, institutions are faced with difficult questions related not only to the location of the program, but the compensation and evaluation of faculty that teach within them, the way in which advising is provided (as many of these programs require more intensive advising to assure students have a coherent curriculum), and how to measure success. Moreover, the problems for international studies administration are not unique. The growing chatter at colleges and universities about interdisciplinary programming face similar challenges. This paper explores the various ways in which current programs are responding to these challenges to provide best practices to guide their success in the academy.

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Anecdotal evidence suggests that International Studies is one of the fastest growing majors on campuses across the U.S. On my own campus alone, the major grew exponentially in a five year period from under 100 interested students in the first couple of years to over 400 today. This is not an isolated trend but it is one that does not have a clear trajectory or programmatic identity. As a result, college administrators find themselves confronting three critical problems. By definition, these programs build upon courses across the university curriculum. One of the first substantive questions that must be addressed has to do with what should be included in the degree requirements. What constitutes the international studies major and how are faculties identified to support it? The second question is more central to the concerns in this essay, where should these programs be housed, given their interdisciplinary orientation? Finally, for that faculty who are asked to teach and advise these students, how should tenure and promotion be evaluated?

International studies curricula are drawn from multiple department ranging from anthropology, geography, history, political science, and sociology. They may also include arts, literature and music. They frequently cross college divisions. Moreover, there is very little consistency between programs offered at various institutions aside from a gateway course and a capstone. (Breuning, M. and Ishiyama, J., 2004, 2007, Brown, J.N., Scott, P., and Shively, J.W. 2006) The courses are often drawn from long lists loosely brought together in department, issue

areas or regional designations with very little to tighten them into a holistic view. As a result, the comparison of these programs remains challenging.

This diversity of classes that are brought together must be housed somewhere on the campus, whether a program in a specific discipline or at the college level. Research has indicated that many models are used, but few are very effective. In his 2009 survey of international studies programs, Blanton found that the majority of these programs were housed in either traditional departments – 31.1 percent, most often political science, or within larger administrative structures, such as colleges or centers - 43.2 percent. (Blanton, 2009) Other models include standalone departments of international studies - 8.1 percent, separate schools or centers - 5.4 percent, and/or a free floating administrator who tries to corral faculty from various departments (12.2 percent who indicated other). As a result, Blanton observes that his respondents noted this “floating” quality of the programs really limited their ability to garner appropriate resources for their programs.

Aside from these content and organizational issues, a more pressing concern from an administration point of view is the extent to which institutions can respond to the popularity of the international studies major and their subsequent rapid growth without compromising academic standards for the students and providing adequate reward structures for the faculty who participate in them. Nor is this problem only associated with international studies. In fact, it is couched in the much broader argument about interdisciplinary studies. While there is great lip service to interdisciplinarity in academia generally, the difficulty in assigning value to this activity in terms of tenure and promotion for faculty who are assigned to discrete departments is significant. While Deans and Program Directors need faculty to teach in their interdisciplinary programs that are increasingly attractive to students and on the face of them are an area that

higher administration deems important, frequently this participation is not rewarded when faculty files are reviewed for retention, tenure and promotion.

What then are the best practices for meeting the demand for international studies, offering a streamlined program of study that will benefit students post-graduation, managing these programs effectively in colleges and universities, and finally, rewarding faculty for their participation in them? Some of the answers can be found in the increasing discussion of managing interdisciplinarity generally in colleges and universities and the ways in which these broader considerations can be applied to international studies. First though, a closer look at the curriculum itself must be taken.

### **International Studies Curricula**

Critical to the formation of international studies programs and the degrees they confer is the subject matter that they address. The tension in international studies curricula has been not only between disciplines but within them as well. The first point of contention has been the frequently asked question – what is the difference between international relations and international studies? In my co-authored article for the International Studies compendium with Harry Chernotsky and Darin Van Tassell, this debate is fleshed out from both an historical and academic point of view. (Hobbs, Chernotsky, Van Tassell, 2010). Key to this distinction is the notion that international relations has generally been concerned with the “political” processes that define interactions between individuals, groups, states and organizations, while international studies is more broadly conceived to include a much broader understanding of “all things international” as defined by various institutional homes. One area of convergence has been in the focus on distinct geographic and cultural areas.

While the concept of area studies in international relations generally has fallen by the wayside to some extent, it has been revived in the international studies curriculum as students focus on competency in a language, usually beyond institutional requirements, and then the history, politics, art, and literature of that area are added from various disciplines. This breadth allows for more active humanities involvement in the subject area. This is not a bad thing and in fact, produces students who may have training in increasingly critical languages and areas for the United States, such as East Asia or the Middle East.

International studies programs are also organized around critical issue areas such as international development, human rights, etc. Here is where some of the problems lie as a smorgasbord of courses is offered up that may peripherally address some facet of these issue areas with little coordination among them. At my own institution, students have eight possible concentrations that include geographic designations, as well as international cultural studies, international economy and environment and international relations. A student interested in international cultural studies could choose from a list of 19 courses in history to satisfy the 2 course requirement for the major, 54 courses across four different departments or programs – African studies, English, Foreign Languages and Literature, and Women’s Studies - for 2 courses in literature, and over 300 courses in fifteen different departments or programs to meet the 3 course requirement in social studies! As a result of this wide range of choices, the courses a student chooses may or may not have any relationship among them. The pressure is then on advisers to try and help students make sense of their choices as well as relying on the capstone to bring these issues together. Who will perform this extensive advising task and teach the Capstone? That question leads to the second and third issue addressed here as to where these

programs should be housed and how faculty should be rewarded for participating in them. Seeking answers to them is part of the larger institutional debate on interdisciplinarity.

### **Interdisciplinary at the crossroads**

As International studies goes forward in its search for a home, the difficulties it has faced are really part of a major conversation going on within colleges and universities as to how they should be configured to respond to the changing nature of research and learning. The academy in some ways has been slow to respond to the way in which much of what goes on in the world today in terms of technological innovation and understanding creeps across disciplinary boundaries. They have often clung to traditional divisions of labor between departments and colleges. One suggestion that many institutions are beginning to explore is the reconfiguration of organizational structures generally to reflect these changing dynamics. As a result, you have combined departments under one roof that now exist in either of school or more dynamic collegial structure to reflect the diverse activities taking place between the various former departments. The Arizona State University model as presented in the Table below by Elizabeth Capaldi shows how a large public institution might restructure under such a system.

**TABLE 1. ACADEMIC REORGANIZATION AT ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY**

New Unit	Former Units
School of Government, Politics and Global Studies	Department of Political Science and School of Global Studies
School of Design Innovation	Department of Industrial Design, Department of Interior Design, and Department of Visual Communication Design
Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts	College of Design and Herberger College of the Arts
W. P. Carey School of Business	W. P. Carey School of Business, School of Global Management and Leadership and Morrison School of Management and Agribusiness
School of Social Transformation	Departments of Justice and Social Inquiry and Women's Studies, plus programs in African and African-American Studies and Asian-Pacific American Studies
School of Historical and Critical Inquiry	Departments of History, Philosophy, and Religious Studies
School of Sustainable Engineering and the Built Environment	Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering and Del E. Webb School of Construction
School of Electrical, Computer and Energy Engineering	Departments of Electrical Engineering and part of Department of Computer Science and Engineering
School of Biological and Health Systems Engineering	Departments of Bioengineering and Biomedical Informatics
School of Computing, Informatics and Decision Systems Engineering	Department Computer Science and Engineering and Department of Industrial, Systems and Operations Engineering
School of Life Sciences	Departments of Biology, Plant Biology, Microbiology and some faculty from Departments of Philosophy and History
School of Nursing and Health Innovation	Departments of Nutrition and Exercise Science and School of Nursing
Disestablished College of Human Services	Units in this college went to other colleges
College of Technology and Innovation	Six departments merged to three

Source: Capaldi, E., 2009.

These ideas are not new. The liberal arts movement of the 1960s and '70s was captured in the formation of the Association for Integrative Studies (<http://www.units.muohio.edu/aisorg/>) in 1979.(Klein, 2006) Subsequent efforts in the 1980s to restructure institutions to echo overlapping interests and provide the best possible education for students also reflect this interest. Beth Casey (1990) explores this notion in her look at three institutions who were leaders in this area at the time: Evergreen State College, the University of California at Santa Cruz and the University of Wisconsin at Green Bay. Interestingly, she notes that even as she

was reporting on them, both UC Santa Cruz and UW Green Bay had to modify their original goals to comply with broader state mandated requirements.

Today, systematic efforts to understand the best way forward can be found in Project Kaleidoscope. Project Kaleidoscope (PKAL): Facilitating Interdisciplinary Learning (FIDL) was funded by the W. M. Keck Foundation and worked with teams from 28 different types of institutions over a three year period from 2007 to 2010 to better understand their interdisciplinary efforts and best practices in regard to planning, evaluation and institutional structures.(Kezar, A. and Elrod, S., 2012) A list of participants can be found below:

**Participating FIDL Campuses**

Agnes Scott College

Beloit College

Bradley University

Canisius College

College of St. Benedict and St. John's University

Davidson College

DePauw University

Florida A&M University

George Mason University

Grinnell College

Indiana University at Bloomington

Jacksonville University

James Madison University

Lafayette College

Moravian College

Nazareth College of Rochester

New York City College of Technology

St. Lawrence University

SUNY Oneonta

The Ohio State University

Union College

United States Military Academy

University of Richmond

Wabash College

West Virginia University

Whittier College

Willamette University

Source: <http://www.aacu.org/pkal/interdisciplinarylearning/institutions.cfm>



One of the first and most important findings of this effort as it relates to the discussion here was what the PKAL study found among approximately 75 percent of the participating campuses: risk aversion. Despite the real world trend to interdisciplinarity, faculty still tends to see it as threatening to disciplinary work. The project addressed this problem by promoting cross campus discussions on the meaning of interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary notions to assure that everyone was on the same page in the broader discussions of the issues. Further, they developed criteria for undergraduate student learning outcomes from interdisciplinary programs, as a way to encourage broader thinking on this issue. The objectives they defined are listed below.

### **PKAL Undergraduate Learning Goals**

As a result of intentional interdisciplinary learning experiences, students will be able to:

- Recognize disciplinary strengths, processes, limitations, and perspectives.
- Purposefully connect and integrate knowledge and skills from across disciplines to solve problems.
- Synthesize and transfer knowledge across disciplinary boundaries in the context of novel situations.
- Be agile, flexible, reflective thinkers who are comfortable with complexity and uncertainty and can apply their knowledge to respond appropriately and positively.
- Understand that a host of factors– cultural, political, ethical, historical, and economic– must be considered when addressing the complex problems of this century.
- Understand the universal nature and deep structure of science, as well as the relationship of the disciplines to each other.
- Be prepared for future learning as lifelong learners in their careers and as citizens.
- Apply their capacity as integrative thinkers to solve problems in ethically and social responsible ways.
- Think critically, communicate effectively, and work collaboratively within diverse cultures and communities.

Source: Kezar and Elrod, 2012.

Problems and politics remained, however, when it came to recruit faculty to serve these students and the ways in which the faculty would be rewarded for working with them. This perception did not change from the beginning to the end of the study. Over 65 percent of the participants believed that without clear incentives and rewards for participation, there would not be significant change. In particular, revisions to tenure and promotion standards would be critical. Yet, this is precisely the area where institutions are particularly tied down. Other reward structures included course releases for participation, course development monies, full credit for team teaching and more general recognition of these efforts at university events and campus publicity. In times of fiscal austerity where campuses find themselves less able to serve their own majors, much less promote innovation to create new course offerings, these proposals will have a great deal of trouble finding support as campus leaders must weigh the various costs confronting them.

Beyond these limitations, the PKAL study found that critical to the success of any move to greater interdisciplinarity at colleges and universities would be the extent to which integration and legitimization of the effort occurred. The authors believe such an institutional change will need 5 to 10 years to be effective and the PKAL project has only been going for three years. Yet, as they note, “changing campus processes is one of the most difficult aspects of interdisciplinary work.”(Kezar and Elrod, 2012) One way they have tried to change this intellectual climate is by bringing noted speakers who support these efforts to campus as a way of gaining larger buy in from both faculty and administrators.

While there is no easy way in which such sweeping changes are going to take place within colleges and universities in a short amount of time, this discussion does find roots on campuses across the United States. As leadership changes, often so does the structure of an

institution and the prevalence of these types of new thinking are increasingly finding their way into strategic planning initiatives. When NC State got a new Chancellor in 2010, one of the first things he proposed was a review of existing operations and the development of a comprehensive strategic plan that would guide the university for the next 5 to 10 years. Of the 9 task forces constituted to undertake strategic planning at NC State, there was a specific committee devoted to Comprehensiveness and Interdisciplinarity. Their final report provides an excellent overview of both the history of interdisciplinary orientations, as well as models from peer and related institutions. ( <http://info.ncsu.edu/strategic-planning/files/2011/01/comprehensiveness-and-interdisciplinarity-wp-fin.pdf>)

Most importantly, they identified several goals, specific recommendations and metrics for evaluating the success of achieving greater interdisciplinarity at NC State. While their voice was included in the final document adopted by the university, the more far reaching changes they advocated that would include alternative university structures and joint appointments to facilitate interdisciplinarity were not. Instead the metrics for success in enhancing interdisciplinarity focused on research funding as measured by source and the number of funded proposals with multiple PIs from different departments, as well as faculty responses to a survey on the question as to whether interdisciplinary work is rewarded in the promotion, tenure, and merit process. (<http://info.ncsu.edu/strategic-planning/files/2011/11/ip-11-2011.pdf>).

Institutional realignments were focused on administrative realignment for smoother institutional operations such as business and student services. The critical restructuring needed to actually reward faculty for participation in these programs was not included.

## **Interdisciplinarity and International Studies**

The implications of these observations are significant for international studies as they by definition are interdisciplinary and need the support of faculty from a wide range of departments across the university to be successful. It is interesting to note that the learning objectives identified by the PKAL study in regards to interdisciplinarity are very similar to those for international studies generally. The following learning objectives for students of international studies were identified in the my ISA compendium article with Chernotsky and Van Tassell:

*First*, there is the vital task of fostering an understanding of the multiple perspectives guiding perceptions and visions across the world. For students to participate in a global society, there is a need for them to develop an awareness of the diversity of cultures and the importance of cross-cultural communication....

*Second*, there is the need to impress a view of the world as an increasingly interconnected set of political, economic, cultural, and ecological systems. Equally important is the need to understand the interdependence of people living within these systems....

*Third*, it is essential for students to gain familiarity with critical issues and controversies impacting on relationships across those systems. Providing an appropriate context for attaining global competency requires an introduction to the growing set of issues that cross international borders and necessitate global responses....

*Fourth*, it is essential to realize the impact of choices in shaping the future direction of those systems. ...There is the need to account for the multiplicity and diversity of perspectives that might be brought to bear in confronting policy decisions.

Source: Hobbs, Chernotsky and Van Tassell, 2010.

Similar outcomes are proposed by Chris Dolan (2011) in his discussion of how to design and implement a new international studies program at a small college. His outcomes assessment headings include the following:

- cosmopolitan outlook, diversity and tolerance and understanding
- interdisciplinary skills
- interdisciplinary dimensions
- perspective
- problem solving, critical thinking, and writing skills

Dolan's explicit reference to interdisciplinary skills and dimensions underscores the need for students to think outside traditional boundaries to develop a better understanding of the world around them.

Substantively, however, until there is broader agreement as to what international studies really is, there will continue to be a gap in developing commonalities in this area. There is a lack of experts on the subject as they are drawn from distinct disciplinary backgrounds to include people who generally have an interest in international issues and areas. One way to measure the distinct characteristics of a field of inquiry is the extent to which there are Ph.D. programs in that area. The Association of Integrative Studies identifies five Ph.D. programs that are operating in the general area of International or Global studies. They include the following institutions and program:

Old Dominion University      International Studies

Rutgers University      Global Affairs

Tufts University      Environmental Studies Interdisciplinary Doctorate; center involved in several PhD programs, including International Environment and Resource Policy

Tulane University      International Development and Technology Transfer

University of Miami      International Studies: Latin American Studies

University of Wisconsin, Madison      Development Studies

Source: [http://www.units.muohio.edu/aisorg/Resources/doctoral\\_programs.shtml](http://www.units.muohio.edu/aisorg/Resources/doctoral_programs.shtml)

What are the characteristics of these programs? Where do their graduates place? In actuality, the Old Dominion program is very similar to international relations programs that can be found at numerous universities around the world. ( <http://al.odu.edu/gpis/phd/index.shtml>) The Ph.D. at the University of Miami also falls within a traditional international relations orientation with an emphasis on three fields: international relations, comparative politics and international and comparative political economy.( <http://www.as.miami.edu/international-studies/Graduate/>). There is not a Ph.D. in Latin American studies, though they do offer an interdisciplinary masters in that area. Such interdisciplinary master's degrees can be found at many institutions most frequently with a professional degree focus. The Association of Professional Schools of International Affairs, with 33 full members and more than 30 affiliates, lists many programs that would fall into this category. ([www.apsia.org](http://www.apsia.org))

The Tufts doctorate cited here demonstrates the different conceptual view being taken between international relations and studies. It provides a doctoral coordinator for students wishing to undertake a self-defined inter- disciplinary doctorate that might include components from any of the 11 doctoral programs offered by the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, as well as the seven Engineering doctorates offered by the School of Engineering Department. (<http://gs.as.tufts.edu/academics/graduateprograms/interdisciplinary.htm>) It is highly selective but lays out a very comprehensive way for candidates to think about program construction. This program does not include, however, the flagship of professional international education located at Tufts University, the Fletcher School which offers a Doctor of Philosophy in International Relations. Fletcher on its own website defines itself as interdisciplinary and includes the following fields of study:

Development Economics  
Human Security  
Humanitarian Studies  
International Business and Economic Law  
International Business Relations  
International Environment and Resource  
International Finance and Banking  
International Information & Communication  
International Monetary Theory & Policy  
International Negotiation & Conflict Resolution  
International Organizations  
International Political Economy  
International Security Studies  
International Trade & Commercial Policies  
Law & Development  
Marketing  
Pacific Asia  
Political Systems & Theories  
Public International Law  
Public & NGO Management  
Southwest Asia & Islamic Civilization  
Strategic Management & International Consultancy  
The United States  
Self-Designed Fields of Study

Source: <http://fletcher.tufts.edu/Academic/Courses/Fields-of-Study>

The Tulane program was launched in 2001 in the Payson Center for International Development located in the Law School. It has temporarily suspended admissions to concentrate on existing students. Finally, the Development Studies Ph.D. program also listed by the Association of Integrative Studies at the University of Wisconsin does strive to be interdisciplinary but focuses on social sciences for the bulk of its curriculum, supplementing with courses from economics and even agriculture based programming based on the student's interests and program needs. (<http://devstudies.wisc.edu/>)

More unique, the Global Affairs doctorate at Rutgers University-Newark strives to identify itself as more interdisciplinary, formally bringing in a broad range of departments and subject to include the following areas:

- Anthropology
- Communication and Information Studies
- Global Security and Global Criminal Justice
- Global Health
- Economics
- International Business
- International Law
- International Relations and Comparative Politics
- Sociology

Source: <http://dga.rutgers.edu/academics/tracks.html>

Housed in the Division of Global Affairs (DGA), the faculty that support the Ph.D. come from a wide range of disciplines including political science, public administration, sociology, anthropology, criminal justice, business, economics, and nursing. This diversity of faculty facilitates interdisciplinary research focused in three primary institutional offices: Center for the



Study of Public Security, Center for the Study of Genocide and Human Rights, and Rutgers Institute on Corruption Studies. Together, they offer students opportunities to address issues across disciplinary backgrounds. A look at the research presentations of Ph.D. students in the program this Spring range from global environmental issues to primary education services to theoretical explorations of genocide and morality.

<http://dga.rutgers.edu/images/stories/informer/seminartabloidflier.pdf>

While there may be other programs that would fall into this area, what this cursory looks tells us is that there is little agreement moving forward into a distinct preparation that constitutes doctoral work in international studies. This lack of clarity really informs the issues confronted not only in the construction of undergraduate international studies programs, and to some extent, master's level programs as well. There are those in the undergraduate curriculum that would say the Ph.D. programs really continue to lie in the social sciences broadly defined, missing both the sciences and humanities that are more frequently a part of the international studies major. What does this mean? International studies simply does not constitute a distinct field of inquiry at this time and must continue to rely on a broader interest in interdisciplinary work that is growing in acceptance across numerous fields for support.

### **International Studies: What can be done?**

What can be done in the immediate future to address the growing pressures the rapid growth of international studies programs present for colleges and universities? Structurally, the types of institutional changes suggested by the Arizona State model and PKAL studies are very relevant for international studies but are part of an emerging dialogue that will take perhaps generations before change occurs. Institutional change is slow and university divisions are

deeply rooted in both historical and cultural distinctions. What then are some tangible ways in the short term to address these structural issues?

1. Generate broader support for programs through open discussions among stakeholders as to what international studies is, even if it is only specific to that institution's perceptions. Identify what student learning outcomes should be; identify why the programs are so popular and how faculty can benefit from participation in them both intellectually and professionally. Aside from serving students demands, identify the broader goals that can be served by these majors to prepare students for a globalized world.
2. Create a department in which tenure standards are broad enough to include the disciplinary background of the faculty in the tenure and promotion process but also recognizing the importance of the interdisciplinary approach not only in teaching but research as well.
3. If a department or dedicated center is not an option, empower a director of international studies within a unit or college with sufficient resources to support its operation with faculty compensation – i.e., release from departmental course demands to serve the broader program. This includes home departmental buy in such that participating faculty are recognized within their own department for these efforts in the tenure and promotion process. Their participation must be seen as more important than a favor to friends around the university or a service to other units, which is most frequently given little, if any, recognition in annual personnel reviews. The result of the current structure is that many of the tasks required to move international studies majors forward rely on part time faculty to carry the degree, as opposed to rank and file faculty members. This represents a fundamental lack of institutional support for international studies majors generally.

The demand for international studies and interdisciplinary programming is growing. While colleges and universities are not going to radically change in the short term, they are going to need to respond to the demand for such programming and the realities of the ways in which the world operates across both intellectual and actual borders. International studies offer students a way to comprehend these dynamics and prepare for the world today. It remains for academic institutions to respond effectively.

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